

## Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

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DCS Communications Office

October 15, 2004

### The Week Ahead

#### Monday, October 18

Commissioner Miller will participate in a panel discussion at the National Center for Adoption Law and Policy Symposium in Columbus, Ohio.

Staff Contact: Lane Simpson, [lane.simpson@state.tn.us](mailto:lane.simpson@state.tn.us)

#### Tuesday, October 19

The Commissioner will meet with state Senator Thelma Harper to discuss progress at DCS.

Staff Contact: Andrea Turner, [andrea.turner@state.tn.us](mailto:andrea.turner@state.tn.us)

#### Wednesday, October 20

Commissioner Miller will speak at the Tennessee Voices for Children "State of the Child Conference," at Calvary United Methodist Church in Nashville.

Staff Contact: Lane Simpson, [lane.simpson@state.tn.us](mailto:lane.simpson@state.tn.us)

#### Thursday, October 21

The Commissioner will deliver the keynote address at the CSA Conference in Columbia.

Staff Contact: Andrea Turner, [andrea.turner@state.tn.us](mailto:andrea.turner@state.tn.us)

### *From the Desk of Commissioner Viola Miller*

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The past six weeks or so have been a wild and stressful ride. We have experienced some bad outcomes for children where we cannot say we did our best. We have dealt with unrelenting negative press fueled in part by statements that perhaps DCS should no longer exist. Let's take a deep breath, lick our wounds, grieve over our losses and then focus on those little twinkling lights at the end of a very long tunnel.

We have admitted since January that we are not what we want to be. We have acknowledged our errors and recognized our flaws. At the same time, we have committed ourselves to a future in which we are the best. This means being better trained, better supported, and, most importantly, providing better outcomes for our children and families.

Bad press, however justified, around a few cases often loses sight of the thousands of children DCS keeps safe, moves to permanent homes and assures their well-being. Please do not lose sight of all the good and important work you do every day. Please do not lose heart and passion. Those are our greatest gifts to Tennessee's families and children.

I see a groundswell of commitment to the philosophy of CFTM...family focused, strength based, culturally responsive. Our work is child safety, child permanency and child and family well-being.

Are we where we want to be...not by a long shot! Are we making progress...you bet!

What are my greatest fears and fondest hopes? The greatest fear is our sense of urgency about our work. Every child and every family deserves our very best. That “best” must embody the understanding that our families cannot wait for us. Their needs are urgent and our response must reflect that urgency. My greatest hope is that our response will always be made within the context of the four basic Principles of Professional Behavior:

1. Preserve the integrity of others;
2. Involve others in problem solving;
3. Practice active listening;
4. Be accountable for your own behavior – TAKE RESPONSIBILITY for our actions.

My greatest hope is for a DCS that treats every with respect and dignity and that with great pride holds itself accountable for the work we do.

We have a new practice model. We have the Path to Excellence. Both are articulated in writing and provide our roadmap to the future. Let’s take pride in what we do even as we strive every day to be better. The families and children of Tennessee deserve our best and we will see to it that they get it.

There is a future ahead where each of us will proudly say, “I work for DCS.” We’ll be proud because we know and have concretely demonstrated that what we do make a difference every day for Tennessee’s families and children.

Thank you for your diligent efforts. Join me in pledging to get up every day and ask, “How can I do this work a little bit better today than I did it yesterday?”

That’s all it takes...working as a team and always striving to be the best. Our vision is simple...to be the very best child welfare agency. Nothing else is good enough. Together, we can realize that goal.

## CORE Leadership

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*\*The following are minutes from the CORE Leadership Meeting that occurred on October 12, 2004.*

- Special Recognition
  - Ken Sanders began the meeting by presenting a special recognition award to Doug Swisher and Joe Cimino. Doug did research on MR kids aging out of the system. Since 2003, DMRS has gotten additional funds for this MR population. Doug found additional funding for FY05 for 4.1 million budget dollars to take care of 65 of our MR young adults.
  - Brenda Bell has been working with the DMRS liaison and identified 101 post custody MR young adults. She stated that Friday they were able to identify 10 MR young adults who were going to be transferred into to DMRS custody. The average cost is \$65,000 per year. DCS has no legal authority over this population. Brenda will do a write up on the MRS progress for the Weekly Wrap Up. (Please see Brenda’s article in this issue!)
  - The Commissioner expressed the importance of not adding more MR young adults into our system as we work on the backlog. The law says MR young adults are to begin working a transition plan at age 17.
  - Ken Sanders and Tom Riche met with Commissioner Goetz. Joe Cimino is drafting a letter on how to make this transition.

- Commissioner Miller met with Steve Norris with MRS. She state it will be more difficult to address the SPMI population.
- Andrea introduced the new Public Information Officer, Danielle Edwards. Her experiences include working at CNN, *Herald Sun* and the *Nashville Banner*.
- Review of Chapter 12 of Practice Model
  - 12-101 – Commissioner stated the regions need to do a better job of concurrent planning. Concurrent planning is having good, high quality casework, not just writing a goal. Permanency planning training needs to be in OJT weeks where the caseworker could work with a monitor and have more one on one.
  - 12-103 – We need to be more consistent in our language – Family Services Plan or Permanency Plan.
  - 12-104 – We need to look at kinship care. Family behavior has cultural inference. We are not sure we take that strongly into consideration -- just because it is a relative, it doesn't necessarily make it the best placement.
  - Bonnie, Ken Sanders, and Sholanda are working very hard regarding TANIF program and hope to have it by Jan. 2005. We are looking at passing a law for guardianship that would require relative to sign an agreement that if reunification doesn't take place within nine months, then relative will petition in court for guardianship of the child.
  - Family Unity Model
  - Commissioner Miller suggested Ken Steverson to look at this model because it puts extended family at the center of planning for the child.
  - 12-105 – Life books start when the child enters custody not just prior to adoption
  - 12-202 – Two regions are piloting functional assessments. A roll out plan will be developed once we have a training schedule.
  - 12-301 – We are currently outsourcing pre-custodial children and families to CSA. We only serve custodial children.
  - 12-400 – Audrey Corder said we need to improve in providing visitation between siblings in custody in different placements. There are other ways to stay in contact, such as letters and phone calls.
  - 12-402 – We have a lot of supervised visitations and this needs to be explored. The court may order this when the child initially enters custody. CM will need to remember to go back and petition the court for unsupervised visitation when there are not safety issues. Therapeutic visitation is a family, new statewide resource and very expensive. It is just one tool in our toolbox. Community partners could also be used to provide supervised visitation at no cost. This includes churches and daycares, for example. We want to work toward training foster parents to work with birth families in providing visitation. Path to Excellence – pilot in Jan. for quality visitation.
  - 12-403 – We are withholding family visitation as behavior management. This needs to stop.
  - 12-501- Commissioner states we need to take out PPLA because this is not permanency.
  - 12-901 – The sole goal of PPLA will have to be reviewed by the Commissioner.
  - 12-602 – The Commissioner stated we keep children in care for too long.
  - 12-701 – The Commissioner wants this one fixed.
  - 12-805 – We need to add foster parents.
  - 12-901 – We need to get approval from the Commissioner for a sole goal for PPLA not PSU supervisor.
  - Commissioner stated we need to rework Chapter 12 because we want this chapter to reflect practice. Elizabeth stated we need to address areas related to PPLA and our perspective on Kinship care needs a common vision.

- **Title VI:**  
Title VI is part of Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Federal Law) says we cannot discriminate in any federal activity on basis of race, national origin or religion. We received an audit finding on this because we had no complaint procedure. William stated a procedure has been developed and explained the current process. He stated the complaints need to be in writing and tied to a specific act, time and person. There are identified Title VI support people in the regions, at CSAs and at YDCs. Albert Dawson is the identified person for group homes.
  - **Leadership Training:**  
The Commissioner will be starting leadership training in Lexington this afternoon. She wants CLT to go through all of this with her at some point. Things she discusses include basic principles, ground rules, dialogue model, problem solving, SWOT analysis, start-stop-continue, and ladder of inference.
  - **Left Hand Column:**  
Commissioner Miller reviewed the “Left Hand Column” with the group. Left Hand Column is a common language strategy. We talk about what we think as opposed to what we say. There are times when we need to share the left hand column for the good of order. This process can really help cut through the group think process and gives permission to be devil’s advocate and put everything on the table.
  - **Foster and Adoption Assistance Board Rates:**  
The new board rates will take effect November 1, 2004. Adoption subsidy will get a 2% increase but we don’t have the financial resources to make the rates retroactive. Elizabeth will be drafting a policy regarding the new rates.
  - **Project Prioritization**  
Michael Price explained that moving FHACP to the top of the list is the most important priority. The impact may change the date for phone in of adoptive services and new board rates. He stated this wouldn’t delay payment to any foster parents. The goal is to incorporate FHACP into TNKids in the May 2005 release.
- OIR has put a freeze on laptops right now.
- **Contracts and Path to Excellence**  
Tom Riche and Ken Sanders met with Commissioner Goetz. The Path to Excellence plan has several consultants and we need to request contracts 60 days in advance. Tom and Ken will meet with program directors to discuss further.
  - **Internal Affairs:**  
Commissioner Miller stated when we move the agency toward quality, it will increase investigations. She didn’t see this as a negative or positive – it just is. We need to look at systemic changes and work with Debra and her staff to prioritize investigations. Also some of these investigations could be handled at the management staff level. Debra stated there is a difference between inquiry and investigation. She will discuss this further during the next CLT meeting.
  - **Report Cards:**  
Last week the Commissioner did an exercise with the RAs to give Central Office grades. The Central Office liaisons will meet with Judy Cole about their grades.

## DCS and DMRS Partner for Kids' Sake

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*Submitted by Brenda Bell, Program Director for Compliance with Juvenile Justice*

There is great news! The Department of Mental Retardation Services (DMRS) has joined with the Department of Children's Services to consider how to remove roadblocks to services for the active post custody MR population.

Three weeks ago, Commissioner Miller and Deputy Commissioner Hommrich met with the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Mental Retardation Services, Steve Norris. They shared with Commissioner Norris their concern about the challenges DCS staff faced when attempting to access DMRS services for these young adults. As a result of their discussions, a decision was made to appoint a liaison for their respective departments who would work together to establish an approach to overcome the challenges.

I have worked with the DMRS liaison for the past several weeks to review the issues you have faced and explore how to help you smooth the transition of young adults from DCS to DMRS services. I am pleased to say DMRS has listened to your concerns and reviewed the information we provided. In fact, the initial group of young adult MR transitioners was identified this week! In such a short period of time, DMRS has reviewed the information and has taken action to develop an approach to begin the transition process.

So where do we go from here? Here's a snapshot.

- DMRS has proceeded with a review to assess an individual's overall need for services plus identify and establish the individual's assigned category of need. The basis of this review is the information you provided to DMRS during the application process.
- We will ask each DCS Regional Administrator to designate a point person for DMRS coordination activities. This person will be the point of contact for the regional DMRS staff.
- Plans are underway in DMRS to develop training for DCS staff on issues such as the DMRS intake process, Pre-Admission Evaluation (PAE) application process, and services offered through the DMRS Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver.
- DCS staff will be provided the DMRS Family Handbook as soon as it is finalized. This will be a ready resource for staff and caregivers.
- To better assist DCS staff in coordinating services, DMRS plans to provide DCS with the DMRS policy for "Criteria for Assessment of Category of Need" and any other DMRS intake policy that would benefit DCS staff. Those policies will be supplied as soon as the TennCare Bureau approves them.
- DMRS has expressed the desire that DCS begin placing a child on the DMRS Waiting List as soon as a child comes into custody and is diagnosed as MR. This approach should aid DMRS in the planning process and ensure an accurate database that identifies the number of persons waiting for DMRS Waiver services, even if the need for services is several years into the future.

In the coming weeks, we will contact each region to update your Active Post Custody MR list and talk with you in greater detail about the transition process. Stay tuned for more information!

## Continuous Quality Improvement

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*Editor's Note: The Weekly CQI column will resume next week.*

## Andrea Walks for Tennessee's Children

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Have you walked with First Lady Andrea Conte? If so, we want to know about it! Please e-mail [andrea.turner@state.tn.us](mailto:andrea.turner@state.tn.us) with details.

## Bulletin Board

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### ***Submitted by Mark Anderson, Office of the Inspector General***

We have just concluded the 2004 ACA Standards Compliance Audit for Mountain View Youth Development Center. The members of the visiting committee have officially recommended the program for re-accreditation, pending final confirmation by the CAC Board of Commissioners.

In preparation for this audit, MVYDC compiled policy and procedure (departmental and local) and semi-annual documentation of compliance for ACA practice standards over a three-year period. Of the 440 standards currently pertaining to Juvenile Training Schools (Youth Development Centers), 33 were weighted standards for which compliance was mandatory to re-accreditation (one mandatory standard was deemed non-applicable to this institution). MVYDC received a **100%** compliance rating for all mandatory standards!

25 of the 407 non-mandatory standards were deemed non-applicable to this program. Of the remaining 382 applicable standards, 382 were found to be compliant by the ACA visiting committee, for an **overall compliance rating of 100% for this program!**

The staff at Mountain View, through their efforts to serve this population of students has worked diligently to achieve and maintain compliance with this exhaustive set of standards, and they should be congratulated for this confirmation of their achievement!



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*For the unlearned, old age is winter; for the learned, it is the season of the harvest.*

- **Hasidic Proverb**

*If you always do what you always did, you will always get what you always got.*

- **Jackie "Moms" Mabley**

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